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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Associations of the Elderly (FIAPA), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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INTEGRATION OF THE ELDERLY INTO SOCIETY: THEIR ROLE AND THEIR PLACE IN URBAN LIFE

FIAPA was established in 1980 by associations of the elderly in four European countries, and today it unites associations established in 39 countries on five continents. According to a recent monograph issued by member associations, FIAPA brings together more than 100 million elderly people.

FIAPA has four objectives:

(a) Ensuring representation of the elderly internationally. On the world level, FIAPA has been granted category I consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. On the European level, FIAPA is one of four members of the consultative body established under the aegis of the Commission of the European Economic Community (EEC). Moreover, the Federation also has consultative status with UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The geographical scope of FIAPA reflects the extraordinary progress of efforts to organize the world's elderly in associations; it has earned FIAPA a hearing at the United Nations, as shown by the recent communications FIAPA received in 1990 from Javier Pérez de Cuéllar and in 1992 from Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali;

(b) Organizing international meetings of elderly people to promote exchanges. Each year, FIAPA organizes an international colloquium bringing together 1,000-1,800 participants from 30 countries. The last colloquium was held in Barcelona in October 1992 and addressed the topic "Cooperation between local authorities and associations to enable the elderly to participate in urban life";

(c) Conducting studies and public opinion research to generate concrete proposals. The most recent public opinion survey carried out by FIAPA in 1992 concerned the topic "The concerns and aspirations of the elderly". The results of that investigation were published in the United Nations Bulletin on Ageing. In order to incorporate the findings of the public opinion survey, FIAPA produced, in collaboration with the United Nations and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (CSDHA), Vienna, the following three action reports:

(i) "Objectives and modalities for cooperation between local authorities and seniors' associations to enable senior citizens to continue to participate in urban life";

(ii) "Health education campaign for the elderly";

(iii) "The elderly person: the family and inter-generational ties';

(d) Mobilizing the elderly and organizing them in associations to achieve true integration into society. It is to this last mission that FIAPA attaches the greatest importance, especially in view of the organization by the United Nations of the International Conference on Human Rights from 14 to 25 June 1993 in Vienna which has as its objective, not only to review progress made in the area of human rights, but also to identify obstacles and to consider new

problems in order to discover ways and means to make further progress in the future.

In the opinion of FIAPA, the ongoing debate regarding human rights should be based on the realities of life.

The first reality is that, according to the above-mentioned 1992 public opinion survey, the elderly's dearest wish is to remain integrated in society and to participate in urban life by playing a volunteer role, performing stimulating work that is also of practical benefit to others.

In a growing number of countries, the elderly are getting together, largely through associations or clubs, in a movement calculated to realize that aspiration, since they feel that they are not receiving the necessary support.

The second reality is that in a number of countries local public authorities, such as regional administrations and mayors, are cutting through this indifference and have put in place mechanisms for cooperation with the movement to organize the elderly in order to enable them to participate in urban life.

Representatives of small localities provided evidence of this cooperation during the above-mentioned ninth international colloquium, which was organized by FIAPA in Barcelona in October 1992.

The third reality is the result of the economic, social and demographic changes which have been observed in numerous countries over the last few years.

A longer period of education and difficulty in finding first-time employment account for the extension of the first stage of life. Later entry into the working world and earlier termination of the working life are shortening the second stage. Lastly, taking retirement at a younger age and especially greater longevity account for a prolongation of the third stage of life.

The three stages of life, namely youth, the working years and old age are tending to become more equal in length. Moreover, in future years the number of people in the third stage, in other words, the elderly, will continue to grow. For example, in France today, one Frenchman in five is older than 60, while in the year 2050 one in three will be older than 60.

That is why there are more and more elderly people of an entirely new type: younger in years or in attitude, in better health, more accessible, more open and more willing to invest their time in the life of their community.

It is the irony of the age that we entrust our national destiny to leaders who are often very old and we admire the genius of captains of industry who are relatively elderly, yet we discount the experience of the elderly in solving the problems of everyday urban life.

It is absurd to underestimate the wealth of experience acquired by the elderly and to neglect the potential accessibility of today's and tomorrow's elderly population.

It is imperative to strengthen the elderly person's civil rights and freedoms to participate in decisions concerning the life of the community in which he or she lives.

However, it is also necessary to permit the elderly to assume their responsibilities by enabling them to voluntarily give of their experience and abilities in service to others: providing information from the collective memory, advice, support, mutual assistance and solidarity. In this way, they can re-establish the dignity of the elderly, which depends upon their having a real role to play in urban life and performing duties as well as enjoying rights.

There is a pressing need to update the outmoded picture of the elderly person. For that reason, it would be unwise to highlight the elderly and their specific problems, since giving so much attention to them might have the effect of excluding them. On the contrary, what is needed is to take into consideration the role of the elderly as participants, in order for them to remain integrated in society.

In order to avoid discrimination based on age, a new concept of age needs to be promoted that would create understanding, solidarity and harmony between the generations and respect of all for the oneness of life.